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SUBJECT: ODIHR HEAD LENARCIC SEEKS "NEW CHAPTER" IN  
ELECTORAL RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Alice Wells for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: On September 9, Janez Lenarcic, Director of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), stated that he hoped for a "new chapter" in relations with Russia and that "there can be no double standards" in how ODIHR treats OSCE member countries. In coordination with the October 12 regional elections, Central Election Commission (CEC) chief Vladimir Churov invited Lenarcic to provide OSCE observers at an internet voting experiment in Tula and at the CEC's information center in Moscow. The CEC also confirmed that Russia will send up to 10 observers as part of the OSCE mission to the U.S. elections in November. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) At a September 9 press conference in Moscow, ODIHR Director Janez Lenarcic stated that he "would like to start a new chapter in relations" between Russia and ODIHR. Lenarcic, who became ODIHR Director on July 1, added that he hoped to "overcome suspicions, build a trusting relationship, and strengthen cooperation" after the tensions that marked the December 2007 and March 2008 Russian elections. Countering GOR concerns that ODIHR dispatches a disproportionate number of election observers to Eastern European and former Soviet countries, Lenarcic noted that "there can be no double standards, there is only one standard -- the obligations of (OSCE) participating countries." Lenarcic added that ODIHR cannot "force its will" on OSCE participating states but rather "can only work with the member country."

¶3. (SBU) Lenarcic did not confirm if or how many OSCE monitors will observe Russia's upcoming regional elections, but Central Election Commission (CEC) chief Vladimir Churov told reporters September 9 that he and Lenarcic agreed that a representative from ODIHR could observe an internet voting experiment in Tula on October 12. Churov also invited an ODIHR representative to be present that day in the CEC's election information center in Moscow.

¶4. (C) Lenarcic said that he agreed with the GOR that election monitoring should take place in all OSCE countries. He also thanked Russia for its promise to send observers to the ODIHR mission to the U.S. elections in November. (Note: According to Russian media, CEC member Igor Borisov stated on September 3 that up to ten of the OSCE's 100 observers will be from Russia. In a July meeting with PolOff, the Russian MFA's OSCE Senior Counselor Vladimir Yanin noted that the GOR would watch carefully to see how many observers the OSCE sends to the United States. Also in July, Federation Council President Sergei Mironov said that ODIHR needs to "get rid of excessive politicization" and that close ODIHR scrutiny of Russian elections reflected "a politicized approach" that "greatly devalued ODIHR efforts to support democratic processes in different countries." Mironov added that he would prefer to see ODIHR as primarily an advisory,

methodology, and information center, "not as the supreme judge of the electoral process." End Note.)

¶5. (C) According to contacts at the Embassy of Finland in Moscow, which provided control assistance for Lenarcic's visit, the ODIHR Director's planned meeting with FM Lavrov has been postponed until the OSCE's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, which begins in Warsaw on September

¶29. Our Finnish Embassy contact added that Lenarcic was "happy" and "quite satisfied" with his meetings in Moscow, including with CEC head Churov and with human rights advocate Ella Panfilova.

¶6. (C) Comment: Lenarcic appears to have made progress in establishing a working relationship with Russian counterparts. This was made easier by the absence of any near-term litmus test of Russian intentions, given the passing of the 2007-2008 cycle of Duma and presidential elections. "Tonality" aside, Lenarcic's visit is likely to have done little to blunt Russia's intent to press for "reforms" of ODIHR. End comment.

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